

*Beauty
and the
Jacobin*

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"DO I SEEM SO USELESS?"

BEAUTY AND THE JACOBIN

AN INTERLUDE OF
THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

BY
BOOTH TARKINGTON

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
C. D. WILLIAMS



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ILLUSTRATIONS

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The author makes his appearance, not now "as a showman before his tent," nor to entreat his audience to be seated in an orderly manner, but to invite any who may be listening to come upon the very scene itself of this drama, which has nothing to do with the theater, and there, invisible, attend what follows.

BEAUTY AND THE JACOBIN

Our scene is in a rusty lodging-house of the Lower Town, Boulogne-sur-Mer, and the time, the early twilight of dark November in northern France. This particular November is dark indeed, for it is November of the year 1793, Frimaire of the Terror. The garret room disclosed to us, like the evening lowering outside its one window, and like the times, is mysterious, obscure, smoked with perplexing shadows; these flying and staggering to echo the shiftings of a young man writing at a desk by the light of a candle.

We are just under the eaves here; the dim ceiling slants; and there are two doors: that in the rear wall is closed; the other, upon our right, and evidently leading to an inner chamber, we find ajar. The furniture of this mean apart-

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ment is chipped, faded, insecure, yet still possessed of a haggard elegance; shamed odds and ends, cheaply acquired by the proprietor of the lodging-house, no doubt at an auction of the confiscated leavings of some emigrant noble. The single window, square and mustily curtained, is so small that it cannot be imagined to admit much light on the brightest of days; however, it might afford a lodger a limited view of the houses opposite and the street below. In fact, as our eyes grow accustomed to the obscurity we discover it serving this very purpose at the present moment, for a tall woman stands close by in the shadow, peering between the curtains with the distrustfulness of a picket thrown far out into an enemy's country. Her coarse blouse and skirt, new and as ill-fitting as sacks, her shop-woman's bonnet and cheap veil, and her rough shoes are naïvely denied by her sensitive, pale hands and the high-bred and in-bred face, long profoundly marked by loss and fear, and now very white, very watchful. She is not more than forty, but her hair, glimpsed beneath the clumsy bonnet, shows much grayer than need be at that age. This is Anne de Laseyne.

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The intent young man at the desk, easily recognizable as her brother, fair and of a singular physical delicacy, is a finely completed product of his race; one would pronounce him gentle in each sense of the word. His costume rivals his sister's in the innocence of its attempt at disguise: he wears a carefully soiled carter's frock, rough new gaiters, and a pair of dangerously aristocratic shoes, which are not too dusty to conceal the fact that they are of excellent make and lately sported buckles. A tousled cap of rabbit-skin, exhibiting a tricolor cockade, crowns these anomalies, though not at present his thin, blond curls, for it has been tossed upon a dressing-table which stands against the wall to the left. He is younger than Madame de Laseyne, probably by more than ten years; and, though his features so strikingly resemble hers, they are free from the permanent impress of pain which she bears like a mourning-badge upon her own.

He is expending a feverish attention upon his task, but with patently unsatisfactory results; for he whispers and mutters to himself, bites the feather of his pen, shakes his head forebodingly, and again and again crumples a written

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sheet and throws it upon the floor. Whenever this happens Anne de Laseyne casts a white glance at him over her shoulder—his desk is in the center of the room—her anxiety is visibly increased, and the temptation to speak less and less easily controlled, until at last she gives way to it. Her voice is low and hurried.

ANNE. Louis, it is growing dark very fast.

LOUIS. I had not observed it, my sister.

[He lights a second candle from the first; then, pen in mouth, scratches at his writing with a little knife.]

ANNE. People are still crowding in front of the wine-shop across the street.

LOUIS [smiling with one side of his mouth]. Naturally. Reading the list of the proscribed that came at noon. Also waiting, amiable vultures, for the next bulletin from Paris. It will give the names of those guillotined day before yesterday. For a good bet: our own names [he nods toward the other room]—yes, hers, too—are all three in the former. As for the latter—well, they can't get us in that now.

ANNE [eagerly]. Then you are certain that we are safe?

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LOUIS. I am certain only that they cannot murder us day before yesterday.

[As he bends his head to his writing a woman comes in languidly through the open door, bearing an armful of garments, among which one catches the gleam of fine silk, glimpses of lace and rich furs—a disordered burden which she dumps pell-mell into a large portmanteau lying open upon a chair near the desk. This new-comer is of a startling gold - and - ivory beauty; a beauty quite literally striking, for at the very first glance the whole force of it hits the beholder like a snowball in the eye; a beauty so obvious, so completed, so rounded, that it is painful; a beauty to rivet the unenvious stare of women, but from the full blast of which either king or man-peasant would stagger away to the confessional. The egregious luster of it is not breathed upon even by its overspreading of sul-

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len revolt, as its possessor carelessly arranges the garments in the portmanteau. She wears a dress all gray, of a coarse texture, but exquisitely fitted to her; nothing could possibly be plainer, or of a more revealing simplicity. She might be twenty-two; at least it is certain that she is not thirty.

At her coming, Louis looks up with a sigh of poignant wistfulness, evidently a habit; for as he leans back to watch her he sighs again. She does not so much as glance at him, but speaks absently to Madame de Laseyne. Her voice is superb, as it should be; deep and musical, with a faint, silvery huskiness.]

ELOISE [the new-comer]. Is he still there?

ANNE. I lost sight of him in the crowd. I think he has gone. If only he does not come back!

LOUIS [with grim conviction]. He will.

ANNE. I am trying to hope not.

ELOISE. I have told you from the first that

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you overestimate his importance. Haven't I said it often enough?

ANNE [under her breath]. You have!

ELOISE [coldly]. He will not harm you.

ANNE [looking out of the window]. More people down there; they are running to the wine-shop.

LOUIS. Gentle idlers!

[The sound of triumphant shouting comes up from the street below.]

That means that the list of the guillotined has arrived from Paris.

ANNE [shivering]. They are posting it in the wine-shop window.

[The shouting increases suddenly to a roar of hilarity, in which the shrilling of women mingles.]

LOUIS. Ah! One remarks that the list is a long one. The good people are well satisfied with it. [To ELOISE.] My cousin, in this amiable populace which you champion, do you never scent something of—well, something of the graveyard scavenger?

[She offers the response of an unmoved glance in his direction, and

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slowly goes out by the door at which she entered. LOUIS sighs again and returns to his scribbling.]

ANNE [nervously]. Haven't you finished, Louis?

LOUIS [indicating the floor strewn with crumpled slips of paper]. A dozen.

ANNE. Not good enough?

LOUIS [with a rueful smile]. I have lived to discover that among all the disadvantages of being a Peer of France the most dangerous is that one is so poor a forger. Truly, however, our parents are not to be blamed for neglecting to have me instructed in this art; evidently they perceived I had no talent for it.

[Lifting a sheet from the desk.]

Oh, vile! I am not even an amateur.

[He leans back, tapping the paper thoughtfully with his pen.]

Do you suppose the Fates took all the trouble to make the Revolution simply to teach me that I have no skill in forgery? Listen.

[He reads what he has written.]

"Committee of Public Safety. In the name of the Republic. To all Officers, Civil and Mili-

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tary: Permit the Citizen Balsage"—that's myself, remember—"and the Citizeness Virginie Balsage, his sister"—that's you, Anne—"and the Citizeness Marie Balsage, his second sister"—that is Eloise, you understand—"to embark in the vessel *Jeune Pierrette* from the port of Boulogne for Barcelona. Signed: Billaud Varennes. Carnot. Robespierre." Execrable!

[He tears up the paper, scattering the fragments on the floor.]

I am not even sure it is the proper form. Ah, that Dossonville!

ANNE. But Dossonville helped us—

LOUIS. At a price. Dossonville! An individual of marked attainment, not only in penmanship, but in the art of plausibility. Before I paid him he swore that the passports he forged for us would take us not only out of Paris, but out of the country.

ANNE. Are you sure we must have a separate permit to embark?

LOUIS. The captain of the *Jeune Pierrette* sent one of his sailors to tell me. There is a new Commissioner from the National Committee, he said, and a special order was issued this morning. They have an officer and a file

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of the National Guard on the quay to see that the order is obeyed.

ANNE. But we bought passports in Paris. Why can't we here?

LOUIS. Send out a street-crier for an accomplished forger? My poor Anne! We can only hope that the lieutenant on the quay may be drunk when he examines my dreadful "permit." Pray a great thirst upon him, my sister!

[He looks at a watch which he draws from beneath his frock.]

Four o'clock. At five the tide in the river is poised at its highest; then it must run out, and the *Jeune Pierrette* with it. We have an hour. I return to my crime.

[He takes a fresh sheet of paper and begins to write.]

ANNE [urgently]. Hurry, Louis!

LOUIS. Watch for Master Spy.

ANNE. I cannot see him.

[There is silence for a time, broken only by the nervous scratching of Louis's pen.]

LOUIS [at work]. Still you don't see him?

ANNE. No. The people are dispersing. They seem in a good humor.

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LOUIS. Ah, if they knew—

[He breaks off, examines his latest effort attentively, and finds it unsatisfactory, as is evinced by the noiseless whistle of disgust to which his lips form themselves. He discards the sheet and begins another, speaking rather absently as he does so.]

I suppose I have the distinction to be one of the most hated men in our country, now that all the decent people have left it—so many by a road something of the shortest! Yes, these merry gentlemen below there would be still merrier if they knew they had within their reach a forfeited “Emigrant.” I wonder how long it would take them to climb the breakneck flights to our door. Lord, there’d be a race for it! Prize-money, too, I fancy, for the first with his bludgeon.

ANNE [lamentably]. Louis, Louis! Why didn’t you lie safe in England?

LOUIS [smiling]. Anne, Anne! I had to come back for a good sister of mine.

ANNE. But I could have escaped alone.

LOUIS. That is it—“alone”!

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[He lowers his voice as he glances toward the open door.]

For she would not have moved at all if I hadn't come to bully her into it. A fanatic, a fanatic!

ANNE [brusquely]. She is a fool. Therefore be patient with her.

LOUIS [warningly]. Hush.

ELOISE [in a loud, careless tone from the other room]. Oh, I heard you! What does it matter?

[She returns, carrying a handsome skirt and bodice of brocade and a woman's long mantle of light-green cloth, hooded and lined with fur. She drops them into the portmanteau and closes it.]

There! I've finished your packing for you.

LOUIS [rising]. My cousin, I regret that we could not provide servants for this flight. [Bowing formally.] I regret that we have been compelled to ask you to do a share of what is necessary.

ELOISE [turning to go out again]. That all?

LOUIS [lifting the portmanteau]. I fear—

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ELOISE [with assumed fatigue]. Yes, you usually do. What now?

LOUIS [flushing painfully]. The portmanteau is too heavy.

[He returns to the desk, sits, and busies himself with his writing, keeping his grieved face from her view.]

ELOISE. You mean you're too weak to carry it?

LOUIS. Suppose at the last moment it becomes necessary to hasten exceedingly—

ELOISE. You mean, suppose you had to run, you'd throw away the portmanteau. [Contemptuously.] Oh, I don't doubt you'd do it!

LOUIS [forcing himself to look up at her cheerfully]. I dislike to leave my baggage upon the field, but in case of a rout it might be a temptation—if it were an impediment.

ANNE [peremptorily]. Don't waste time. Lighten the portmanteau.

LOUIS. You may take out everything of mine.

ELOISE. There's nothing of yours in it except your cloak. You don't suppose—

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ANNE. Take out that heavy brocade of mine.

ELOISE. Thank you for not wishing to take out my fur-lined cloak and freezing me at sea!

LOUIS [gently]. Take out both the cloak and the dress.

ELOISE [astounded]. What!

LOUIS. You shall have mine. It is as warm, but not so heavy.

ELOISE [angrily]. Oh, I am sick of your eternal packing and unpacking! I am sick of it!

ANNE. Watch at the window, then.

[She goes swiftly to the portmanteau, opens it, tosses out the green mantle and the brocaded skirt and bodice, and tests the weight of the portmanteau.]

I think it will be light enough now, Louis.

LOUIS. Do not leave those things in sight. If our landlord should come in—

ANNE. I'll hide them in the bed in the next room. Eloise!

[She points imperiously to the window. ELOISE goes to it slowly.]

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ly and for a moment makes a scornful pretense of being on watch there; but as soon as Madame DE LASEYNE has left the room she turns, leaning against the wall and regarding LOUIS with languid amusement. He continues to struggle with his ill-omened "permit," but, by and by, becoming aware of her gaze, glances consciously over his shoulder and meets her half-veiled eyes. Coloring, he looks away, stares dreamily at nothing, sighs, and finally writes again, absently, like a man under a spell, which, indeed, he is. The pen drops from his hand with a faint click upon the floor. He makes the movement of a person suddenly wakened, and, holding his last writing near one of the candles, examines it critically. Then he breaks into low, bitter laughter.]

ELOISE [unwillingly curious]. You find something amusing?

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LOUIS. Myself. One of my mistakes, that is all.

ELOISE [indifferently]. Your mirth must be indefatigable if you can still laugh at those.

LOUIS. I agree. I am a history of error.

ELOISE. You should have made it a vocation; it is your one genius. And yet—truly because I am a fool I think, as Anne says—I let you hector me into a sillier mistake than any of yours.

LOUIS. When?

ELOISE [flinging out her arms]. Oh, when I consented to this absurd journey, this *tiresome* journey—with *you*! An “escape”? From nothing. In “disguise.” Which doesn’t disguise.

LOUIS [his voice taut with the effort for self-command]. My sister asked me to be patient with you, Eloise—

ELOISE. Because I am a fool, yes. Thanks. [Shrewishly.] And then, my worthy young man?

[He rises abruptly, smarting almost beyond endurance.]

LOUIS [breathing deeply]. Have I not been patient with you?

ELOISE [with a flash of energy]. If *I* have

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asked you to be anything whatever—with me! —pray recall the petition to my memory.

LOUIS [beginning to let himself go]. Patient! Have I ever been anything but patient with you? Was I not patient with you five years ago when you first harangued us on your “Rights of Man” and your monstrous republicanism? Where you got hold of it all I don’t know—

ELOISE [kindling]. Ideas, my friend. Naturally, incomprehensible to you. Books! Brains! Men!

LOUIS. “Books! Brains! Men!” Treason, poison, and mobs! Oh, I could laugh at you then: they were only beginning to kill us, and I was patient. Was I not patient with you when these Republicans of yours drove us from our homes, from our country, stole all we had, assassinated us in dozens, in hundreds, murdered our King?

[He walks the floor, gesticulating nervously.]

When I saw relative after relative of my own—aye, and of yours, too—dragged to the abattoir—even poor, harmless, kind André de Laseyne, whom they took simply because he was my brother-in-law—was I not patient? And when

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I came back to Paris for you and Anne, and had to lie hid in a stable, every hour in greater danger because you would not be persuaded to join us, was I not patient? And when you finally did consent, but protested every step of the way, pouting and—

ELOISE [stung]. "Pouting!"

LOUIS. And when that stranger came posting after us so obvious a spy—

ELOISE [scornfully]. Pooh! He is nothing.

LOUIS. Is there a league between here and Paris over which he has not dogged us? By diligence, on horseback, on foot, turning up at every posting-house, every roadside inn, the while you laughed at me because I read death in his face! These two days we have been here, is there an hour when you could look from that window except to see him grinning up from the wine-shop door down there?

ELOISE [impatiently, but with a somewhat conscious expression]. I tell you not to fear him. There is nothing in it.

LOUIS [looking at her keenly]. Be sure I understand why you do not think him a spy! You believe he has followed us because you—

ELOISE. I expected that! Oh, I knew it

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would come! [Furiously.] I never saw the man before in my life!

LOUIS [pacing the floor]. He is unmistakable; his trade is stamped on him; a hired trailer of your precious "Nation's."

ELOISE [haughtily]. The Nation is the People. You malign because you fear. The People is sacred!

LOUIS [with increasing bitterness]. Aren't you tired yet of the Palais Royal platitudes? I have been patient with your Mericourtisms for so long. Yes, always I was patient. Always there was time; there was danger, but there was a little time.

[He faces her, his voice becoming louder, his gestures more vehement.]

But now the *Jeune Pierrette* sails this hour, and if we are not out of here and on her deck when she leaves the quay, my head rolls in Samson's basket within the week, with Anne's and your own to follow! *Now*, I tell you, there is no more time, and *now*—

ELOISE [suavely]. Yes? Well? "*Now?*"

[He checks himself; his lifted hand falls to his side.]

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LOUIS [in a gentle voice]. I am still patient.

[He looks into her eyes, makes her a low and formal obeisance, and drops dejectedly into the chair at the desk.]

ELOISE [dangerously]. Is the oration concluded?

LOUIS. Quite.

ELOISE [suddenly volcanic]. Then "*now*" you'll perhaps be "patient" enough to explain why I shouldn't leave you instantly. Understand fully that I have come thus far with you and Anne solely to protect you in case you were suspected. "*Now*," my little man, you are safe: you have only to go on board your vessel. Why should I go with you? Why do you insist on dragging me out of the country?

LOUIS [wearily]. Only to save your life; that is all.

ELOISE. My life! Tut! My life is safe with the People—my People!

[She draws herself up magnificently.]

The Nation would protect me! I gave the people my whole fortune when they were starving. After that, who in France dare lay a finger upon the Citizeness Eloise d'Anville!

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LOUIS. I have the idea sometimes, my cousin, that perhaps if you had not given them your property they would have taken it, anyway. [Dryly.] They did mine.

ELOISE [agitated]. I do not expect you to comprehend what I felt—what I feel!

[She lifts her arms longingly.]

Oh, for a Man!—a Man who could understand me!

LOUIS [sadly]. That excludes me!

ELOISE. Shall I spell it?

LOUIS. You are right. So far from understanding you, I understand nothing. The age is too modern for me. I do not understand why this rabble is permitted to rule France; I do not even understand why it is permitted to live.

ELOISE [with superiority]. Because you belong to the class that thought itself made of porcelain and the rest of the world clay. It is simple: the mud-ball breaks the vase.

LOUIS. You belong to the same class, even to the same family.

ELOISE. You are wrong. One circumstance proves me no aristocrat.

LOUIS. What circumstance?

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ELOISE. That I happened to be born with brains. I can account for it only by supposing some hushed-up ancestral scandal. [Brusquely.] Do you understand that?

LOUIS. I overlook it.

[He writes again.]

ELOISE. Quibbling was always a habit of yours. [Snapping at him irritably.] Oh, stop that writing! You can't do it, and you don't need it. You blame the people because they turn on you now, after you've whipped and beaten and ground them underfoot for centuries and centuries and—

LOUIS. Quite a career for a man of twenty-nine!

ELOISE. I have said that quibbling was—

LOUIS [despondently]. Perhaps it is. To return to my other deficiencies, I do not understand why this spy who followed us from Paris has not arrested me long before now. I do not understand why you hate me. I do not understand the world in general. And in particular I do not understand the art of forgery!

[He throws down his pen.]

ELOISE. You talk of "patience"! How often



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have I explained that you would not need passports of any kind if you would let me throw off my incognito. If any one questions you, it will be sufficient if I give my name. All France knows the Citizeness Eloise d'Anville. Do you suppose the officer on the quay would dare oppose—

LOUIS [with a gesture of resignation]. I know you think it.

ELOISE [angrily]. You tempt me not to prove it. But for Anne's sake—

LOUIS. Not for mine. That, at least, I understand. [He rises.] My dear cousin, I am going to be very serious—

ELOISE. O heaven!

[She flings away from him.]

LOUIS [plaintively]. I shall not make another oration—

ELOISE. Make anything you choose. [Drumming the floor with her foot.] What does it matter?

LOUIS. I have a presentiment—I ask you to listen—

ELOISE [in her irritation almost screaming]. How can I *help* but listen? And Anne, too! [With a short laugh.] You know as well as I

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do that when that door is open everything you say in this room is heard in there.

[She points to the open doorway, where MADAME DE LASEYNE instantly makes her appearance, and after exchanging one fiery glance with ELOISE as swiftly withdraws, closing the door behind her with outraged emphasis.]

ELOISE [breaking into a laugh]. Forward, soldiers!

LOUIS [reprovingly]. Eloise!

ELOISE. Well, *open* the door, then, if you want her to hear you make love to me! [Coolly.] That's what you're going to do, isn't it?

LOUIS [with imperfect self-control]. I wish to ask you for the last time—

ELOISE [flouting]. There are so many last times!

LOUIS. To ask you if you are sure that you know your own heart. You cared for me once, and—

ELOISE [as if this were news indeed]. I did? Who under heaven ever told you that?

LOUIS [flushing]. You allowed yourself to be betrothed to me, I believe.

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ELOISE. "Allowed" is the word, precisely. I seem to recall changing all that the very day I became an orphan—and my own master! [Satirically polite.] Pray correct me if my memory errs. How long ago was it? Six years? Seven?

LOUIS [with emotion]. Eloise, Eloise, you did love me then! We were happy, both of us, so very happy—

ELOISE [sourly]. "Both!" My faith! But I must have been a brave little actress.

LOUIS. I do not believe it. You loved me. I—
[He hesitates.]

ELOISE. Do get on with what you have to say.

LOUIS [in a low voice]. I have many forebodings, Eloise, but the strongest—and for me the saddest—is that this is the last chance you will ever have to tell—to tell me—

[He falters again.]

ELOISE [irritated beyond measure, shouting]. To tell you *what?*

LOUIS [swallowing]. That your love for me still lingers.

ELOISE [promptly]. Well, it doesn't. So *that's* over!

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LOUIS. Not quite yet. I—

ELOISE [dropping into a chair]. O Death!

LOUIS [still gently]. Listen. I have hope that you and Anne may be permitted to escape; but as for me, since the first moment I felt the eyes of that spy from Paris upon me I have had the premonition that I would be taken back—to the guillotine, Eloise. I am sure that he will arrest me when I attempt to leave this place to-night. [With sorrowful earnestness.] And it is with the certainty in my soul that this is our last hour together that I ask you if you cannot tell me that the old love has come back. Is there nothing in your heart for me?

ELOISE. Was there anything in *your* heart for the beggar who stood at your door in the old days?

LOUIS. Is there nothing for him who stands at yours now, begging for a word?

ELOISE [frowning]. I remember you had the name of a disciplinarian in your regiment.

[She rises to face him.]

Did you ever find anything in your heart for the soldiers you ordered tied up and flogged? Was there anything in your heart for the peasants who starved in your fields?

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LOUIS [quietly]. No; it was too full of you.

ELOISE. Words! Pretty little words!

LOUIS. Thoughts. Pretty, because they are of you. All, always of you—always, my dear. I never really think of anything but you. The picture of you is always before the eyes of my soul; the very name of you is forever in my heart. [With a rueful smile.] And it is on the tips of my fingers, sometimes when it shouldn't be. See.

[He steps to the desk and shows her a scribbled sheet.]

This is what I laughed at a while ago. I tried to write, with you near me, and unconsciously I let your name creep into my very forgery! I wrote it as I wrote it in the sand when we were children; as I have traced it a thousand times on coated mirrors—on frosted windows.

[He reads the writing aloud.]

“Permit the Citizen Balsage and his sister, the Citizeness Virginie Belsage, and his second sister, the Citizeness Marie Balsage, and Eloise d’Anville”—so I wrote!—“to embark upon the vessel *Jeune Pierrette*—” You see?

[He lets the paper fall upon the desk.]

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Even in this danger, that I feel closer and closer with every passing second, your name came in of itself. I am like that English Mary: if they will open my heart when I am dead, they shall find, not "Calais," but "Eloise"!

ELOISE [going to the dressing-table]. Louis, that doesn't interest me.

[She adds a delicate touch or two to her hair, studying it thoughtfully in the dressing-table mirror.]

LOUIS [somerly]. I told you long ago—

ELOISE [smiling at her reflection]. So you did—often!

LOUIS [breathing quickly]. I have nothing new to offer. I understand. I bore you.

ELOISE. Louis, to be frank: I don't care what they find in your heart when they open it.

LOUIS [with a hint of sternness]. Have you never reflected that there might be something for me to forgive you?

ELOISE [glancing at him over her shoulder in frowning surprise]. What!

LOUIS. I wonder sometimes if you have ever found a flaw in your own character.

ELOISE [astounded]. So!

[Turning sharply upon him.]

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You are assuming the right to criticize me, are you? Oho!

LOUIS [agitated]. I state merely—I have said—I think I forgive you a great deal—

ELOISE [beginning to char]. You do! You bestow your gracious pardon upon me, do you? [Bursting into flame.] Keep your forgiveness to yourself! When I want it I'll kneel at your feet and beg it of you! You can *kiss* me then, for then you will know that "the old love has come back"!

LOUIS [miserably]. When you kneel—

ELOISE. Can you picture it—*Marquis*?

[She hurls his title at him, and draws herself up in icy splendor.]

I am a woman of the Republic!

LOUIS. And the Republic has no need of love.

ELOISE. Its daughter has no need of yours!

LOUIS. Until you kneel to me. You have spoken. It is ended.

[Turning from her with a pathetic gesture of farewell and resignation, his attention is suddenly arrested by something invisible. He stands for a moment trans-

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fixed. When he speaks, it is in an altered tone, light and at the same time ominous.]

My cousin, suffer the final petition of a bore. Forgive my seriousness; forgive my stupidity, for I believe that what one hears now means that a number of things are indeed ended. Myself among them.

ELOISE [not comprehending]. "What one hears?"

LOUIS [slowly]. In the distance.

[Both stand motionless to listen, and the room is silent. Gradually a muffled, multitudinous sound, at first very faint, becomes audible.]

ELOISE. What is it?

LOUIS [with pale composure]. Only a song! [The distant sound becomes distinguishable as a singing from many unmusical throats and pitched in every key, a drum-beat booming underneath; a tumultuous rumble which grows slowly louder. The door of the inner room opens, and MADAME DE LASEYNE enters.]

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ANNE [briskly, as she comes in]. I have hidden the cloak and the dress beneath the mattress. Have you—

LOUIS [lifting his hand]. Listen!

[She halts, startled. The singing, the drums, and the tumult swell suddenly much louder, as if the noise-makers had turned a corner.]

ANNE [crying out]. The “Marseillaise”!

LOUIS. The “Vultures’ Chorus”!

ELOISE [in a ringing voice]. The Hymn of Liberty!

ANNE [trembling violently]. It grows louder.

LOUIS. *Nearer!*

ELOISE [running to the window]. They are coming this way!

ANNE [rushing ahead of her]. They have turned the corner of the street. Keep back, Louis!

ELOISE [leaning out of the window, enthusiastically]. *Vive la—*

[She finishes with an indignant gurgle as ANNE DE LASEYNE, without comment, claps a prompt hand over her mouth and pushes her vigorously from the window.]

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ANNE. A mob—carrying torches and dancing. [Her voice shaking wildly.] They are following a troop of soldiers.

LOUIS. The National Guard.

ANNE. Keep back from the window! A man in a tricolor scarf marching in front.

LOUIS. A political, then—an official of their government.

ANNE. O Virgin, have mercy!

[She turns a stricken face upon her brother.]

It is that—

LOUIS [biting his nails]. Of course. Our spy.

[He takes a hesitating step toward the desk; but swings about, goes to the door at the rear, shoots the bolt back and forth, apparently unable to decide upon a course of action; finally leaves the door bolted and examines the hinges. ANNE, meanwhile, has hurried to the desk, and, seizing a candle there, begins to light others in a candelabrum on the dressing-table. The noise out-

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side grows to an uproar; the "Marseillaise" changes to "Ça ira"; and a shaft of the glare from the torches below shoots through the window and becomes a staggering red patch on the ceiling.]

ANNE [feverishly]. Lights! Light those candles in the sconce, Eloise! Light all the candles we have.

[ELOISE, resentful, does not move.]

LOUIS. No, no! Put them out!

ANNE. Oh, fatal!

[She stops him as he rushes to obey his own command.]

If our window is lighted he will believe we have no thought of leaving, and pass by.

[She hastily lights the candles in a sconce upon the wall as she speaks; the shabby place is now brightly illuminated.]

LOUIS. He will not pass by.

[The external tumult culminates in riotous yelling, as, with a final roll, the drums cease to beat. MADAME DE LASEYNE runs again to the window.]

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ELOISE [sullenly]. You are disturbing yourselves without reason. They will not stop here.

ANNE [in a sickly whisper]. They *have* stopped.

LOUIS. At the door of this house?

[MADAME DE LASEYNE, leaning against the wall, is unable to reply, save by a gesture. The noise from the street dwindles to a confused, expectant murmur. LOUIS takes a pistol from beneath his blouse, strides to the door, and listens.]

ANNE [faintly]. He is in the house. The soldiers followed him.

LOUIS. They are on the lower stairs. [He turns to the two women humbly.] My sister and my cousin, my poor plans have only made everything worse for you. I cannot ask you to forgive me. We are caught.

ANNE [vitalized with the energy of desperation]. Not till the very last shred of hope is gone!

[She springs to the desk and begins to tear the discarded sheets into minute fragments.]

Is that door fastened?

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LOUIS. They'll break it down, of course.

ANNE. Where is our passport from Paris?

LOUIS. Here.

[He gives it to her.]

ANNE. Quick! Which of these "permits" is the best?

LOUIS. They're all hopeless—

[He fumbles among the sheets on the desk.]

ANNE. Any of them. We can't stop to select.

[She thrusts the passport and a haphazard sheet from the desk into the bosom of her dress. An orderly tramping of heavy shoes and a clinking of metal become audible as the soldiers ascend the upper flight of stairs.]

ELOISE. All this is childish. [Haughtily.] I shall merely announce—

ANNE [uttering a half-choked scream of rage]. You'll announce nothing! Out of here, both of you!

LOUIS. No, no!

ANNE [with breathless rapidity, as the noise on the stairs grows louder]. Let them break the

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door in if they will; only let them find me alone.

[She seizes her brother's arm imploringly as he pauses, uncertain.]

Give me the chance to make them think I am here alone.

LOUIS. I can't—

ANNE [urging him to the inner door]. Is there any other possible hope for us? Is there any other possible way to gain even a little time? Louis, I want your word of honor not to leave that room unless I summon you. I must have it!

[Overborne by her intensity, Louis nods despairingly, allowing her to force him toward the other room. The tramping of the soldiers, much louder and very close, comes to a sudden stop. There is a sharp word of command, and a dozen muskets ring on the floor just beyond the outer door.]

ELOISE [folding her arms]. You needn't think I shall consent to hide myself. I shall tell them—

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ANNE [in a surcharged whisper]. You will *not* ruin us! [With furious determination, as a loud knock falls upon the door.] In *there*, I tell you!

[Almost physically she sweeps both ELOISE and LOUIS out of the room, closes the door upon them, and leans against it, panting. The knocking is repeated. She braces herself to speak.]

ANNE [with a catch in her throat]. Who is—there?

A SONOROUS VOICE. French Republic!

ANNE [faltering]. It is—it is difficult to hear. What do you—

THE VOICE. Open the door.

ANNE [more firmly]. That is impossible.

THE VOICE. Open the door.

ANNE. What is your name?

THE VOICE. Valsin, National Agent.

ANNE. I do not know you.

THE VOICE. Open!

ANNE. I am here alone. I am dressing. I can admit no one.

THE VOICE. For the last time: open!

ANNE. No!

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THE VOICE. Break it down.

[A thunder of blows from the butts of muskets falls upon the door.]

ANNE [rushing toward it in a passion of protest]. No, no, no! You shall not come in! I tell you I have not finished dressing. If you are men of honor— *Ah!*

[She recoils, gasping, as a panel breaks in, the stock of a musket following it; and then, weakened at rusty bolt and crazy hinge, the whole door gives way and falls crashing into the room. The narrow passage thus revealed is crowded with shabbily uniformed soldiers of the National Guard, under an officer armed with a saber. As the door falls a man wearing a tricolor scarf strides by them, and, standing beneath the dismantled lintel, his hands behind him, sweeps the room with a smiling eye.

This personage is handsomely, almost dandiacally dressed in



VALSIN

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black; his ruffle is of lace, his stockings are of silk; the lapels of his waistcoat, overlapping those of his long coat, exhibit a rich embroidery of white and crimson. These and other details of elegance, such as his wearing powder upon his dark hair, indicate either insane daring or an importance quite overwhelming. A certain easy power in his unusually brilliant eyes favors the probability that, like Robespierre, he can wear what he pleases. Undeniably he has distinction. Equally undeniable is something in his air that is dapper and impish and lurking.

His first glance over the room apparently affording him acute satisfaction, he steps lightly across the prostrate door, MADAME DE LASEYNE retreating before him but keeping herself between him and the inner door. He comes to an unexpected halt in a dancing-

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master's posture, removing his huge hat—which displays a tri-color plume of ostrich feathers—with a wide flourish, an intentional burlesque of the old-court manner.

VALSIN. Permit me. [He bows elaborately.] Be gracious to a recent fellow-traveler. I introduce myself. At your service: Valsin, Agent of the National Committee of Public Safety.

[He faces about sharply.]

Soldiers!

[They stand at attention.]

To the street door. I will conduct the examination alone. My assistant will wait on this floor, at the top of the stair. Send the people away down below there, officer. Look to the courtyard. Clear the streets.

[The officer salutes, gives a word of command, and the soldiers shoulder their muskets, march off, and are heard clanking down the stairs. VALSIN tosses his hat upon the desk, and turns smilingly to the trembling but determined MADAME DE LASEYNE.]

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ANNE [summoning her indignation]. How dare you break down my door! How dare you force your—

VALSIN [suavely]. My compliments on the celerity with which the citizeness has completed her toilet. Marvelous! An example to her sex.

ANNE. You intend robbery, I suppose.

VALSIN [with a curt laugh]. Not precisely.

ANNE. What, then?

VALSIN. I have come principally for the returned Emigrant, Louis Valny-Cherault, formerly called Marquis de Valny-Cherault, formerly of the former regiment of Valny; also formerly—

ANNE [cutting him off sharply]. I do not know what you mean by all these names—and “formerlies”!

VALSIN. No? [Persuasively.] Citizeness, pray assert that I did not encounter you last week on your journey from Paris—

ANNE [hastily]. It is true I have been to Paris on business; you may have seen me—I do not know. Is it a crime to return from Paris?

VALSIN [in a tone of mock encourage-

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ment]. It will amuse me to hear you declare that I did not see you traveling in company with Louis Valny-Cherault. Come! Say it.

ANNE [stepping back defensively, closer to the inner door]. I am alone, I tell you! I do not know what you mean. If you saw me speaking with people in the diligence, or at some posting-house, they were only traveling acquaintances. I did not know them. I am a widow—

VALSIN. My condolences. Poor, of course?

ANNE. Yes.

VALSIN. And lonely, of course? [Apologetically.] Loneliness is in the formula: I suggest it for fear you might forget.

ANNE [doggedly]. I am alone.

VALSIN. Quite right.

ANNE [confusedly]. I am a widow, I tell you—a widow, living here quietly with—

VALSIN [taking her up quickly]. Ah—“*with*”! Living here alone, and also “*with*”—whom? Not your late husband?

ANNE [desperately]. With my niece.

VALSIN [affecting great surprise]. Ah! A niece! And the niece, I take it, is in your other room yonder?

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ANNE [huskily]. Yes.

VALSIN [taking a step forward]. Is she pretty?

[ANNE places her back against the closed door, facing him grimly. He assumes a tone of indulgence.]

Ah, one must not look: the niece, likewise, has not completed her toilet.

ANNE. She is—asleep.

VALSIN [glancing toward the dismantled doorway]. A sound napper! Why did you not say instead that she was—shaving?

[He advances, smiling.]

ANNE [between her teeth]. You shall not go in! You cannot see her! She is—

VALSIN [laughing]. Allow me to prompt you. She is not only asleep; she is ill. She is starving. Also, I cannot go in because she is an orphan. Surely, she is an orphan? A lonely widow and her lonely orphan niece. Ah, touching—and sweet!

ANNE [hotly]. What authority have you to force your way into my apartment and insult—

VALSIN [touching his scarf]. I had the honor to mention the French Republic.

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ANNE. So! Does the French Republic persecute widows and orphans?

VALSIN [gravely]. No. It is the making of them!

ANNE [crying out]. Ah, horrible!

VALSIN. I regret that its just severity was the cause of your own bereavement, citizeness. When your unfortunate husband, André, formerly known as the Prince de Laseyne—

ANNE [defiantly, though tears have sprung to her eyes]. I tell you I do not know what you mean by these titles. My name is Balsage.

VALSIN. Bravo! The Widow Balsage, living here in calm obscurity with her niece. Widow Balsage, answer quickly, without stopping to think. [Sharply.] How long have you lived here?

ANNE. Two months. [Faltering.]—A year!

VALSIN [laughing]. Good. Two months and a year! No visitors? No strangers?

ANNE. No.

VALSIN [wheeling quickly and picking up LOUIS's cap from the dressing-table]. This cap, then, belongs to your niece.

ANNE [flustered, advancing toward him as

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if to take it]. It was—it was left here this afternoon by our landlord.

VALSIN [musingly]. That is very, very puzzling.

[He leans against the dressing-table in a careless attitude, his back to her.]

ANNE [cavalierly]. Why “puzzling”?

VALSIN. Because I sent him on an errand to Paris this morning.

[She flinches, but he does not turn to look at her, continuing in a tone of idle curiosity.]

I suppose your own excursion to Paris was quite an event for you, Widow Balsage. You do not take many journeys?

ANNE. I am too poor.

VALSIN. And you have not been contemplating another departure from Boulogne?

ANNE. No.

VALSIN [still in the same careless attitude, his back toward her and the closed door]. Good. It is as I thought: the portmanteau is for ornament.

ANNE [choking]. It belongs to my niece. She came only an hour ago. She has not unpacked.

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VALSIN. Naturally. Too ill.

ANNE. She had traveled all night; she was exhausted. She went to sleep at once.

VALSIN. Is she a somnambulist?

ANNE [taken aback]. Why?

VALSIN [indifferently]. She has just opened the door of her room in order to overhear our conversation.

[Waving his hand to the dressing-table mirror, in which he had been gazing.]

Observe it, Citizeness Laseyne.

ANNE [demoralized]. I do not—I— [Stamping her foot.] How often shall I tell you my name is Balsage!

VALSIN [turning to her apologetically]. My wretched memory. Perhaps I might remember better if I saw it written: I beg a glance at your papers. Doubtless you have your certificate of citizenship—

ANNE [trembling]. I have papers, certainly.

VALSIN. The sight of them—

ANNE. I have my passport; you shall see. [With wildly shaking hands she takes from her blouse the passport and the "permit," crumpled together.] It is in proper form—

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[She is nervously replacing the two papers in her bosom when with a sudden movement he takes them from her. She cries out incoherently, and attempts to recapture them.]

VALSIN [extending his left arm to fend her off.] Yes, here you have your passport. And there you have others.

[He points to the littered floor under the desk.]

Many of them!

ANNE. Old letters!

[She clutches at the papers in his grasp.]

VALSIN [easily fending her off]. Doubtless!

[He shakes the "permit" open.]

Oho! A permission to embark—and signed by three names of the highest celebrity. Alas, these unfortunate statesmen, Billaud Varennes, Carnot, and Robespierre! Each has lately suffered an injury to his right hand. What a misfortune for France! And what a coincidence! One has not heard the like since we closed the theaters.

ANNE [furiously struggling to reach his hand]. Give me my papers! Give me—

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VALSIN [holding them away from her]. You see, these unlucky great men all had their names signed for them by somebody else. And I should judge that this somebody else must have been writing quite recently—less than half an hour ago, from the freshness of the ink—and in considerable haste; perhaps suffering considerable anguish of mind, Widow Balsage!

[MADAME DE LASEYNE, overwhelmed, sinks into a chair. He comes close to her, his manner changing startlingly.]

VALSIN [bending over with sudden menace, his voice loud and harsh]. Widow Balsage, if you intend no journey, why have you this forged permission to embark on the *Jeune Pierrette*? Widow Balsage, *who* is the Citizen Balsage?

ANNE [faintly]. My brother.

VALSIN [straightening up]. Your first truth. [Resuming his gaiety.] Of course he is not in that room yonder with your niece.

ANNE [brokenly]. No, no, no; he is not! He is not here.

VALSIN [commiseratingly]. Poor woman! You have not even the pleasure to perceive how droll you are.

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ANNE. I perceive that I am a fool!

[She dashes the tears from her eyes and springs to her feet.]

I also perceive that you have denounced us before the authorities here—

VALSIN. Pardon. In Boulogne it happens that *I* am the authority. I introduce myself for the third time: Valsin, Commissioner of the National Committee of Public Safety. Tallien was sent to Bordeaux; Collot to Lyons; I to Boulogne. Citizeness, were all of the august names on your permit genuine, you could no more leave this port without my counter-signature than you could take wing and fly over the Channel!

ANNE [with a shrill laugh of triumph]. You have overreached yourself! You're an ordinary spy: you followed us from Paris—

VALSIN [gaily]. Oh, I intended you to notice that!

ANNE [unheeding]. You have claimed to be Commissioner of the highest power in France. We can prove that you are a common spy. You may go to the guillotine for that. Take care, Citizen! So! You have denounced us; we denounce you. I'll have

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you arrested by your own soldiers. I'll call them—

[She makes a feint of running to the window. He watches her coolly, in silence; and she halts, chagrined.]

VALSIN [pleasantly]. I was sure you would not force me to be premature. Remark it, Citizeness Laseyne: I am enjoying all this. I have waited a long time for it.

ANNE [becoming hysterical]. I am the Widow Balsage, I tell you! You do not know us—you followed us from Paris. [Half sobbing.] You're a spy—a hanger-on of the police. We will prove—

VALSIN [stepping to the dismantled doorway]. I left my assistant within hearing—a species of animal of mine. I may claim that he belongs to me. A worthy patriot, but skilful, who has had the honor of a slight acquaintance with you, I believe. [Calling.] Dossonville!

[Dossonville, a large man, flabby of flesh, loose-mouthed, grizzled, carelessly dressed, makes his appearance in the doorway. He has a harsh and reckless eye;

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and, obviously a flamboyant bully by temperament, his abject, dog-gish deference to VALSIN is instantly impressive, more than confirming the latter's remark that Dossonville "belongs" to him. Dossonville, apparently, is a chattel indeed, body and soul. At sight of him Madame de Laseyne catches at the desk for support and stands speechless.]

VALSIN [easily]. Dossonville, you may inform the Citizeness Laseyne what office I have the fortune to hold.

DOSSONVILLE [coming in]. Bright heaven! All the world knows that you are the representative of the Committee of Public Safety. Commissioner to Boulogne.

VALSIN. With what authority?

DOSSONVILLE. Absolute — unlimited! Naturally. What else would be useful?

VALSIN. You recall this woman, Dossonville?

DOSSONVILLE. She was present when I delivered the passport to the Emigrant Valny-Cherault, in Paris.

VALSIN. Did you forge that passport?

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DOSSONVILLE. No. I told the Emigrant I had. Under orders. [Grinning.] It was genuine.

VALSIN. Where did you get it?

DOSSONVILLE. From you.

VALSIN [suavely]. Sit down, Dossonville.

[The latter, who is standing by a chair, obeys with a promptness more than military. VALSIN turns smilingly to MADAME DE LASEYNE.]

Dossonville's instructions, however, did not include a "permit" to sail on the *Jeune Pierrette*. All of which, I confess, Citizeness, has very much the appearance of a trap!

[He tosses the two papers upon the desk. Utterly dismayed, she makes no effort to secure them. He regards her with quizzical enjoyment.]

ANNE. Ah—you—

[She fails to speak coherently.]

VALSIN. Dossonville has done very well. He procured your passport, brought your "disguises," planned your journey, even gave you directions how to find these lodgings in

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Boulogne. Indeed, I instructed him to omit nothing for your comfort.

[He pauses for a moment.]

If I am a spy, Citizeness Laseyne, at least I trust your gracious intelligence may not cling to the epithet "ordinary." My soul! but I appear to myself a most uncommon type of spy—a very intricate, complete, and unusual spy, in fact.

ANNE [to herself, weeping]. Ah, poor Louis!

VALSIN [cheerfully]. You are beginning to comprehend? That is well. Your niece's door is still ajar by the discreet width of a finger, so I assume that the Emigrant also begins to comprehend. Therefore I take my ease!

[He seats himself in the most comfortable chair in the room, crossing his legs in a leisurely attitude, and lightly drumming the tips of his fingers together, the while his peaceful gaze is fixed upon the ceiling. His tone, as he continues, is casual.]

You understand, my Dossonville, having long ago occupied this very apartment myself, I am serenely aware that the Emigrant can leave

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the other room only by the window; and as this is the fourth floor, and a proper number of bayonets in the courtyard below are arranged to receive any person active enough to descend by a rope of bed-clothes, one is confident that the said Emigrant will remain where he is. Let us make ourselves comfortable, for it is a delightful hour—an hour I have long promised myself. I am in a good humor. Let us all be happy. Citizeness Laseyne, enjoy yourself. Call me some bad names!

ANNE [between her teeth]. If I could find one evil enough!

VALSIN [slapping his knee delightedly]. There it is: the complete incompetence of your class. You poor aristocrats, you do not even know how to swear. Your ancestors knew how! They were fighters; they knew how to swear because they knew how to attack; you poor moderns have no profanity left in you, because, poisoned by idleness, you have forgotten even how to resist. And yet you thought yourselves on top, and so you were—but as foam is on top of the wave. You forgot that power, like genius, always comes from underneath, because

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it is produced only by turmoil. We have had to wring the neck of your feather-head court, because while the court was the nation the nation had its pockets picked. You were at the mercy of anybody with a pinch of brains: adventurers like Mazarin, like Fouquet, like Law, or that little commoner, the woman Fish, who called herself Pompadour and took France—France, merely!—from your King, and used it to her own pleasure. Then, at last, after the swindlers had well plucked you—at last, unfortunate creatures, the People got you! Citizeness, the People had starved: be assured they will eat you to the bone—and then eat the bone! You are helpless because you have learned nothing and forgotten everything. You have forgotten everything in this world except how to be fat!

DOSSONVILLE [applauding with unction]. Beautiful! It is beautiful, all that! A beautiful speech!

VALSIN. Ass!

DOSSONVILLE [meekly]. Perfectly, perfectly.

VALSIN [crossly]. That wasn't a speech; it was the truth. Citizeness Laseyne, so far as you are concerned, I am the People.

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[He extends his hand negligently,
with open palm.]

And I have got you.

[He clenches his fingers, like a
cook's on the neck of a fowl.]

Like that! And I'm going to take you back to
Paris, you and the Emigrant.

[She stands in an attitude eloquent of despair. His glance roves from her to the door of the other room, which is still slightly ajar; and, smiling at some fugitive thought, he continues, deliberately.]

I take you: you and your brother—and that rather pretty little person who traveled with you.

[There is a breathless exclamation from the other side of the door, which is flung open violently, as ELOISE—flushed, radiant with anger, and altogether magnificent—sweeps into the room to confront VALSIN.]

ELOISE [slamming the door behind her].
Leave this Jack-in-Office to me, Anne!

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DOSSONVILLE [dazed by the vision]. Lord! What glory!

[He rises, bowing profoundly, muttering hoarsely.]

Oh, eyes! Oh, hair! Look at her shape! Her chin! The divine—

VALSIN [getting up and patting him reassuringly on the back]. The lady perceives her effect, my Dossonville. It is no novelty. Sit down, my Dossonville.

[The still murmurous DOSSONVILLE obeys. VALSIN turns to ELOISE, a brilliant light in his eyes.]

Let me greet one of the nieces of Widow Balsage—evidently not the sleepy one, and certainly not ill. Health so transcendent—

ELOISE [placing her hand upon Madame LASEYNE's shoulder]. This is a clown, Anne. You need have no fear of him whatever. His petty authority does not extend to us.

VALSIN [deferentially]. Will the niece of Widow Balsage explain why it does not?

ELOISE [turning upon him fiercely]. Because the patriot Citizeness Eloise d'Anville is here!

VALSIN [assuming an air of thoughtful-

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ness]. Yes, she is here. That “permit” yonder even mentions her by name. It is curious. I shall have to go into that. Continue, niece.

ELOISE [with supreme haughtiness]. This lady is under her protection.

VALSIN [growing red]. Pardon. Under whose protection?

ELOISE [sulphurously]. Under the protection of Eloise d’Anville!

[This has a frightful effect upon VALSIN; his face becomes contorted; he clutches at his throat, apparently half strangled, staggers, and falls choking into the easy-chair he has formerly occupied.]

VALSIN [gasping, coughing, incoherent]. Under the pro—the protection—

[He explodes into peal after peal of uproarious laughter.]

The protection of— Aha, ha, ha, ho, ho, ho!

[He rocks himself back and forth unappeasably.]

ELOISE [with a slight lift of the eyebrows]. This man is an idiot.

VALSIN [during an abatement of his attack].

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Oh, pardon! It is—too—much—too much for me! You say—these people are—

ELOISE [stamping her foot]. Under the protection of Eloise d'Anville, imbecile! You cannot touch them. She wills it!

[At this, VALSIN shouts as if pleading for mercy, and beats the air with his hands. He struggles to his feet and, pounding himself upon the chest, walks to and fro in the effort to control his convulsion.]

ELOISE [to ANNE, under cover of the noise he makes]. I was wrong: he is not an idiot.

ANNE [despairingly]. He laughs at you.

ELOISE [in a quick whisper]. Out of bluster; because he is afraid. He is badly frightened. I know just what to do. Go into the other room with Louis.

ANNE [protesting weakly]. I can't hope—

ELOISE [flashing from a cloud]. *You* failed, didn't you?

[Madame DE LASEYNE, after a tearful perusal of the stern resourcefulness now written in the younger woman's eyes, succumbs

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with a piteous gesture of assent and goes out forlornly. ELOISE closes the door and stands with her back to it.]

VALSIN [paying no attention to them].
Eloise d'Anville!

[Still pacing the room in the struggle to subdue his hilarity.]
This young citizeness speaks of the protection of Eloise d'Anville!

[Leaning feebly upon DOSSONVILLE's shoulder.]

Do you hear, my Dossonville? It is an ecstasy. Ecstasize, then. Scream, Dossonville!

DOSSONVILLE [puzzled, but evidently accustomed to being so, cackles instantly]. Perfectly. Ha, ha! The citizeness is not only stirringly beautiful, she is also—

VALSIN. She is also a wit. Susceptible henchman, concentrate your thoughts upon domesticity. In this presence remember your wife!

ELOISE [peremptorily]. Dismiss that person. I have something to say to you.

VALSIN [wiping his eyes]. Dossonville, you are not required. We are going to be sentimental, and heaven knows you are not the

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moon. In fact, you are a fat old man. Exit, obesity! Go somewhere and think about your children. Flit, whale!

DOSSONVILLE [rising]. Perfectly, my chief-tain.

[He goes to the broken door.]

ELOISE [tapping the floor with her shoe]. Out of hearing!

VALSIN. The floor below.

DOSSONVILLE. Well understood. Perfectly, perfectly!

[He goes out through the hallway; disappears, chuckling grossly. There are some moments of silence within the room, while he is heard clumping down a flight of stairs; then VALSIN turns to ELOISE with burlesque ardor.]

VALSIN. "Alone at last!"

ELOISE [maintaining her composure]. Rabbit!

VALSIN [dropping into the chair at the desk, with mock dejection]. Repulsed at the outset! Ah, Citizeness, there were moments on the journey from Paris when I thought I detected a certain kindness in your glances at the lonely stranger.

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ELOISE [folding her arms]. You are to withdraw your soldiers, countersign the "permit," and allow my friends to embark at once.

VALSIN [with solemnity]. Do you give it as an order, Citizeness?

ELOISE. I do. You will receive suitable political advancement.

VALSIN [in a choked voice]. You mean as a—a reward?

ELOISE [haughtily]. *I* guarantee that you shall receive it!

[He looks at her strangely; then, with a low moan, presses his hand to his side, seeming upon the point of a dangerous seizure.]

VALSIN [managing to speak]. I can only beg you to spare me. You have me at your mercy.

ELOISE [swelling]. It is well for you that you understand that!

VALSIN [shaking his hand ruefully]. Yes; you see I have a bad liver: it may become permanently enlarged. Laughter is my great danger.

ELOISE [crying out with rage]. *Oh!*

VALSIN [dolorously]. I have continually to

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remind myself that I am no longer in the first flush of youth.

ELOISE. Idiot! Do you not know who I am!

VALSIN. You? Oh yes—

[He checks himself abruptly; looks at her with brief intensity; turns his eyes away, half closing them in quick meditation; smiles, as upon some secret pleasantry, and proceeds briskly.]

Oh yes, yes, I know who you are.

ELOISE [beginning haughtily]. Then you—

VALSIN [at once cutting her off]. As to your name, I do not say. Names at best are details; and your own is a detail that could hardly be thought to matter. *What* you are is obvious: you joined Louis and his sister in Paris at the barriers, and traveled with them as “Marie Balsage,” a sister. You might save us a little trouble by giving us your real name; you will probably refuse, and the police will have to look it up when I take you back to Paris. Frankly, you are of no importance to us, though of course we’ll send you to the Tribunal. No doubt you are a poor relative of the Valny—

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Cheraults, or, perhaps, you may have been a governess in the Laseyne family, or—

ELOISE [under her breath]. Idiot! Idiot!

VALSIN [with subterranean enjoyment, watching her sidelong]. Or the good-looking wife of some faithful retainer of the Emigrant's, perhaps.

ELOISE [with a shrill laugh]. Does the Committee of Public Safety betray the same intelligence in the appointment of *all* its agents? [Violently.] Imbecile, I—

VALSIN [quickly raising his voice to check her]. You are of no importance, I tell you!

[Changing his tone.]

Of course I mean politically. [With broad gallantry.] Otherwise, I am the first to admit extreme susceptibility. I saw that you observed it on the way—at the taverns, in the diligence, at the posting-houses, at—

ELOISE [with serenity]. Yes. I am accustomed to oglers.

VALSIN. Alas, I believe you! My unfortunate sex is but too responsive.

ELOISE [gasping]. "Responsive"— Oh!

VALSIN [indulgently]. Let us return to the safer subject. Presently I shall arrest those

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people in the other room and, regretfully, you too. But first I pamper myself; I chat; I have an attractive woman to listen. In the matter of the arrest, I delay my fire; I do not flash in the pan, but I lengthen my fuse. Why? For the same reason that when I was a little boy and had something good to eat, I always first paid it the compliments of an epicure. I looked at it a long while. I played with it. Then—I devoured it! I am still like that. And Louis yonder is good to eat, because I happen not to love him. However, I should mention that I doubt if he could recall either myself or the circumstance which annoyed me; some episodes are sometimes so little to certain people and so significant to certain other people.

[He smiles, stretching himself luxuriously in his chair.]

Behold me, Citizeness! I am explained. I am indulging my humor: I play with my cake. Let us see into what curious little figures I can twist it.

ELOISE. Idiot!

VALSIN [pleasantly]. I have lost count, but I think that is the sixth idiot you have called

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me. Aha, it is only history, which one admires for repeating itself. Good! Let us march. I shall play—

[He picks up the “permit” from the desk, studies it absently, and looks whimsically at her over his shoulder, continuing:]

I shall play with—with all four of you.

ELOISE [impulsively]. Four?

VALSIN. I am not easy to deceive; there are four of you here.

ELOISE [staring]. So?

VALSIN. Louis brought you and his sister from Paris: a party of three. This “permit” which he forged is for four; the original three and the woman you mentioned a while ago, Eloise d’Anville. Hence she must have joined you here. The deduction is plain: there are three people in that room: the Emigrant, his sister, and this Eloise d’Anville. To the trained mind such reasoning is simple.

ELOISE [elated]. Perfectly!

VALSIN [with an air of cunning]. Nothing escapes me. You see that.

ELOISE. At first glance! I make you my most profound compliments. Sir, you are an eagle!

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VALSIN [smugly]. Thanks. Now, then, pretty governess, you thought this d'Anville might be able to help you. What put that in your head?

ELOISE [with severity]. Do you pretend not to know what she is?

VALSIN. A heroine I have had the misfortune never to encounter. But I am informed of her character and history.

ELOISE [sternly]. Then you understand that even the Agent of the National Committee risks his head if he dares touch people she chooses to protect.

VALSIN [extending his hand in plaintive appeal]. Be generous to my opacity. How could *she* protect anybody?

ELOISE [with condescension]. She has earned the gratitude—

VALSIN. Of whom?

ELOISE [superbly]. Of the Nation!

VALSIN [breaking out again]. Ha, ha, ha!
[Clutching at his side.]

Pardon, oh, pardon, liver of mine. I must not die; my life is still useful.

ELOISE [persisting stormily]. Of the People, stupidity! Of the whole People, dolt! Of France, blockhead!

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VALSIN [with a violent effort, conquering his hilarity]. There! I am saved. Let us be solemn, my child; it is better for my malady. You are still so young that one can instruct you that individuals are rarely grateful; "the People," never. What you call "the People" means folk who are not always sure of their next meal; therefore their great political and patriotic question is the cost of food. Their heroes are the champions who are going to make it cheaper; and when these champions fail them or cease to be useful to them, then they either forget these poor champions—or eat them. Let us hear what your Eloise d'Anville has done to earn the reward of being forgotten instead of eaten.

ELOISE [her lips quivering]. She surrendered her property voluntarily. She gave up all she owned to the Nation.

VALSIN [genially]. And immediately went to live with her relatives in great luxury.

ELOISE [choking]. The Republic will protect her. She gave her whole estate—

VALSIN. And the order for its confiscation was already written when she did it.

ELOISE [passionately]. Ah—*liar!*

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VALSIN [smiling]. I have seen the order.

[She leans against the wall,
breathing heavily. He goes on,
smoothly.]

Yes, this martyr "gave" us her property; but one hears that she went to the opera just the same and wore more jewels than ever, and lived richly upon the Laseynes and Valny-Cheraults, until *they* were confiscated. Why, all the world knows about this woman; and let me tell you, to your credit, my governess, I think you have a charitable heart: you are the only person I ever heard speak kindly of her.

ELOISE [setting her teeth]. Venom!

VALSIN [observing her slyly]. It is with difficulty I am restraining my curiosity to see her—also to hear her!—when she learns of her proscription by a grateful Republic.

ELOISE [with shrill mockery]. Proscribed? Eloise d'Anville proscribed? Your inventions should be more plausible, Goodman Spy! I *knew* you were lying—

VALSIN [smiling]. You do not believe—

ELOISE [proudly]. Eloise d'Anville is a known Girondist. The Gironde is the real power in France.

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VALSIN [mildly]. That party has fallen.

ELOISE [with fire]. Not far! It will revive.

VALSIN. Pardon, Citizeness, but you are behind the times, and they are very fast nowadays—the times. The Gironde is dead.

ELOISE [ominously]. It may survive *you*, my friend. Take care!

VALSIN [unimpressed]. The Gironde had a grand façade, and that was all. It was a party composed of amateurs and orators; and of course there were some noisy camp-followers and a few comic-opera vivandières, such as this d'Anville. In short, the Gironde looked enormous because it was hollow. It was like a pie that is all crust. We have tapped the crust—with a knife, Citizeness. There is nothing left.

ELOISE [contemptuously]. You say so. Nevertheless, the Rolands—

VALSIN [gravely]. Roland was found in a field yesterday; he had killed himself. His wife was guillotined the day after you left Paris. Every one of their political friends is proscribed.

ELOISE [shaking as with bitter cold]. It is a lie! Not Eloise d'Anville!

VALSIN [rising]. Would you like to see the warrant for her arrest.



ELOISE D'ANVILLE

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[He takes a packet of documents from his breast pocket, selects one, and spreads it open before her.]

Let me read you her description: "Eloise d'Anville, aristocrat. Figure, comely. Complexion, blond. Eyes, dark blue. Nose, straight. Mouth, wide—"

ELOISE [in a burst of passion, striking the warrant a violent blow with her clenched fist.]
Let them dare!

[Beside herself, she strikes again, tearing the paper from his grasp. She stamps upon it.]

Let them dare, I say!

VALSIN [picking up the warrant]. Dare to say her mouth is wide?

ELOISE [cyclonic]. Dare to arrest her!

VALSIN. It does seem a pity.

[He folds the warrant slowly and replaces it in his pocket.]

Yes, a great pity. She was the one amusing thing in all this somberness. She will be missed. The Revolution will lack its joke.

ELOISE [recoiling, her passion exhausted].
Ah, infamy!

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[She turns from him, covering her face with her hands].

VALSIN [with a soothing gesture]. Being only her friend, you speak mildly. The d'Anville herself would call it blasphemy.

ELOISE [with difficulty]. She is—so vain—then?

VALSIN [lightly]. Oh, a type—an actress.

ELOISE [her back to him]. How do you know? You said—

VALSIN. That I had not encountered her. [Glibly.] One knows best the people one has never seen. Intimacy confuses judgment. I confess to that amount of hatred for the former Marquis de Valny-Cherault that I take as great an interest in all that concerns him as if I loved him. And the little d'Anville concerns him—yes, almost one would say, consumes him. The unfortunate man is said to be so blindly faithful that he can speak her name without laughing.

ELOISE [stunned]. Oh!

VALSIN [going on, cheerily]. No one else can do that, Citizeness. Jacobins, Cordeliers, Hébertists, even the shattered relics of the Gironde itself, all alike join in the colossal laughter at

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this Tricoteuse in Sèvres—this Jeanne d'Arc in rice-powder!

ELOISE [tragically]. They laugh—and proclaim her an outlaw!

VALSIN [waving his hand carelessly]. Oh, it is only that we are sweeping up the last remnants of aristocracy, and she goes with the rest—into the dust-heap. She should have remained a royalist; the final spectacle might have had dignity. As it is, she is not of her own class, not of ours: neither fish nor flesh nor—but yes, perhaps, after all, she is a fowl.

ELOISE [brokenly]. Alas! Homing—with wounded wing!

[She sinks into a chair with pathetic grace, her face in her hands.]

VALSIN [surreptitiously grinning]. Not at all what I meant. [Brutally.] Peacocks don't fly.

ELOISE [regaining her feet at a bound]. You imitation dandy! You—

VALSIN [with benevolence]. My dear, your indignation for your friend is chivalrous. It is admirable; but she is not worth it. You do not understand her: you have probably seen her so much that you have never seen her as she is.

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ELOISE [witheringly]. But you, august Zeus, having *never* seen her, will reveal her to me!

VALSIN [smoothly urbane]. If you have ears. You see, she is not altogether unique, but of a variety known to men who are wise enough to make a study of women.

ELOISE [snapping out a short, loud laugh in his face]. *Pouff!*

VALSIN [unruffled]. I profess myself an apprentice. The science itself is but in its infancy. Women themselves understand very well that they are to be classified, and they fear that we shall perceive it: they do not really wish to be known. Yet it is coming; some day our cyclopedists will have you sorted, classed, and defined with precision; but the d'Alembert of the future will not be a woman, because no woman so disloyal will ever be found. Men have to acquire loyalty to their sex: yours is an instinct. Citizen governess, I will give you a reading of the little d'Anville from this unwritten work. To begin—

ELOISE [feverishly interested, but affecting languor]. *Must* you?

VALSIN. To Eloise d'Anville the most interesting thing about a rose-bush has always

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been that Eloise d'Anville could smell it. Moonlight becomes important when it falls upon her face; sunset is worthy when she grows rosy in it. To her mind, the universe was set in motion to be the background for a decoration, and she is the decoration. She believes that the cathedral was built for the fresco. And when a dog interests her, it is because he would look well beside her in a painting. Such dogs have no minds. I refer you to all the dogs in the portraits of Beauties.

ELOISE [not at all displeased; pretending carelessness]. Ah, you have heard that she is beautiful?

VALSIN. Far worse: that she is a Beauty. Let nothing ever tempt *you*, my dear, into setting up in that line. For you are very well-appearing, I assure you; and if you had been surrounded with all the disadvantages of the d'Anville, who knows but that you might have become as famous a Beauty as she? What makes a Beauty is not the sumptuous sculpture alone, but a very peculiar arrogance—not in the least arrogance of mind, my little governess. In this, your d'Anville emerged from childhood full-panoplied indeed; and the feather-

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head court fell headlong at her feet. It was the fated creature's ruin.

ELOISE [placidly]. And it is because of her beauty that you drag her to the guillotine?

VALSIN. Bless you, I merely convey her!

ELOISE. Tell me, logician, was it not her beauty that inspired her to give her property to the Nation?

VALSIN. It was.

ELOISE. What perception! I am faint with admiration. And no doubt it was her beauty that made her a Republican?

VALSIN. What else?

ELOISE. Hail, oracle!

[She releases an arpeggio of satiric laughter.]

VALSIN. That laugh is diaphanous. I see you through it, already convinced.

[She stops laughing immediately.]

Ha! we may proceed. Remark this, governess: a Beauty is the living evidence of man's immortality; the one plain proof that he has a soul.

ELOISE. It is not so bad then, after all?

VALSIN. It is utterly bad. But of all people a Beauty is most conscious of her duality. Her

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whole life is based upon her absolute knowledge that her Self and her body are two. She sacrifices all things to her beauty because her beauty feeds her Self with a dreadful food which it has made her unable to live without.

ELOISE. My little gentleman, you talk like a sentimental waiter. Your metaphors are all hot from the kitchen.

VALSIN [nettled]. It is natural; unlike your Eloise, I am *really* of "the People"—and starved much in my youth.

ELOISE. But, like her, you are still hungry.

VALSIN. A Beauty is a species of cannibal priestess, my dear. She will make burnt-offerings of her father and her mother, her sisters—her lovers—to her beauty, that it may in turn bring her the food she must have or perish.

ELOISE. *Boum!*

[She snaps her fingers.]

And of course she bathes in the blood of little children?

VALSIN [grimly]. Often.

ELOISE [averting her gaze from his]. This mysterious food—

VALSIN. Not at all mysterious. Sensation.

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There you have it. And that is why Eloise d'Anville is a renegade. You understand perfectly.

ELOISE. You are too polite. No.

VALSIN [gaily]. Behold, then! Many women who are not Beauties are beautiful, but in such women you do not always discover beauty at your first glance: it is disclosed with a subtle tardiness. It does not dazzle; it is reluctant; but it grows as you look again and again. You get a little here, a little there, like glimpses of children hiding in a garden. It is shy, and sometimes closed in from you altogether, and then, unexpectedly, this belated loveliness springs into bloom before your very eyes. It retains the capacity of surprise, the vital element of charm. But the Beauty lays all waste before her at a stroke: it is soon over. Thus your Eloise, brought to court, startled Versailles; the sensation was overwhelming. Then Versailles got used to her, just as it had to its other prodigies: the fountains were there, the King was there, the d'Anville was there; and naturally, one had seen them; saw them every day—one talked of matters less accepted. That was horrible to Eloise. She had tasted;

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the appetite, once stirred, was insatiable. At any cost she must henceforth have always the sensation of being a sensation. She must be the pivot of a reeling world. So she went into politics. Ah, Citizeness, there was one man who understood Beauties—not Homer, who wrote of Helen! Romance is gallant by profession, and Homer lied like a poet. For the truth about the Trojan War is that the wise Ulysses made it, not because Paris stole Helen, but because the Trojans were threatening to bring her back.

ELOISE [unwarily]. Who was the man that understood Beauties?

VALSIN. Bluebeard.

[He crosses the room to the dressing-table, leans his back against it in an easy attitude, his elbows resting upon the top.]

ELOISE [slowly, a little tremulously]. And so Eloise d'Anville should have her head cut off?

VALSIN. Well, she thought she was in politics, didn't she? [Suavely.] You may be sure she thoroughly enjoyed her hallucination that she was a great figure in the Revolution—which was cutting off the heads of so many of her

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relatives and old friends! Don't waste your pity, my dear.

ELOISE [looking at him fixedly]. Citizen, you must have thought a great deal about my unhappy friend. She might be flattered by so searching an interest.

VALSIN [negligently]. Not interest in her, governess, but in the Emigrant who cools his heels on the other side of that door, greatly to my enjoyment, waiting my pleasure to arrest him. The poor wretch is the one remaining lover of this girl: faithful because he let his passion for her become a habit; and he will never get over it until he has had possession. She has made him suffer frightfully, but I shall never forgive her for not having dealt him the final stroke. It would have saved me all the bother I have been put to in avenging the injury he did me.

ELOISE [frowning]. What "final stroke" could she have "dealt" him?

VALSIN [with sudden vehement intensity]. She could have loved him!

[He strikes the table with his fist.]

I see it! I see it! Beauty's husband! [Pound-

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ing the table with each exclamation, his voice rising in excitement.] What a vision! This damned, proud, loving Louis, a pomade bearer! A buttoner! An errand-boy to the perfumer's, to the chemist's, to the milliner's! A groom of the powder-closet—

ELOISE [snatching at the opportunity]. How noisy you are!

VALSIN [discomfited, apologetically]. You see, it is only so lately that we of "the People" have dared even to whisper. Of course, now that we are free to shout, we overdo it. We let our voices out, we let our joys out, we let our hates out. We let everything out—except our prisoners!

[He smiles winningly.]

ELOISE [slowly]. Do you guess what all this bluster—this tirade upon the wickedness of beauty—makes me think?

VALSIN. Certainly. Being a woman, you cannot imagine a bitterness which is not "personal."

ELOISE [laughing]. "Being a woman," I think that the person who has caused you the greatest suffering in your life must be very good-looking!

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VALSIN [calmly]. Quite right. It was precisely this d'Anville. I will tell you.

[He sits on the arm of a chair near her, and continues briskly.]

I was not always a politician. Six years ago I was a soldier in the Valny regiment of cavalry. That was the old army, that droll army, that royal army; so ridiculous that it was truly majestic. In the Valny regiment we had some rouge-pots for officers—and for a colonel, who but our Emigrant yonder! Aha! we suffered in the ranks, let me tell you, when Eloise had been coy; and one morning it was my turn. You may have heard that she was betrothed first to Louis and later to several others? My martyrdom occurred the day after she had announced to the court her betrothal to the young Duc de Creil, whose father afterward interfered. Louis put us on drill in a hard rain: he had the habit of relieving his chagrin like that. My horse fell, and happened to shower our commander with mud. Louis let out all his rage upon me: it was an excuse, and, naturally, he disliked mud. But I was rolling in it, with my horse: I also disliked it—and I was indiscreet enough to attempt some small reply.

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That finished my soldiering, Citizeness. He had me tied to a post before the barracks for the rest of the day. I remember with remarkable distinctness that the valets of heaven had neglected to warm the rain for that bath; that it was February; and that Louis's orders had left me nothing to wear upon my back except an unfulsome descriptive placard and my modesty. Altogether it was a disadvantageous position, particularly for the exchange of repartee with such of my comrades as my youthful amiability had not endeared; I have seldom seen more cheerful indifference to bad weather. Inclement skies failed to injure the spectacle: it was truly the great performance of my career; some people would not even go home to eat, and peddlers did a good trade in cakes and wine. In the evening they whipped me conscientiously—my tailor has never since made me an entirely comfortable coat. Then they gave me the place of honor at the head of a procession by torchlight and drummed me out of camp with my placard upon my back. So I adopted another profession: I had a friend who was a doctor in the stables of d'Artois; and I knew horses. He made me his assistant.

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ELOISE [shuddering]. You are a veterinarian!

VALSIN [smiling]. No; a horse-doctor. It was thus I "retired" from the army and became a politician. My friend was only a horse-doctor himself, but his name happened to be Marat.

ELOISE. Ah, frightful!

[For the first time she begins to feel genuine alarm.]

VALSIN. The sequence is simple. If Eloise d'Anville hadn't coquetted with young Creil I shouldn't be Commissioner here to-day, settling my account with Louis. I am in his debt for more than the beating: I should tell you there was a woman in my case, a slender lace-maker with dark eyes—very pretty eyes. She had furnished me with a rival, a corporal; and he brought her for a stroll in the rain past our barracks that day when I was attracting so much unsought attention. They waited for the after-piece, enjoyed a pasty and a bottle of Beaune, and went away laughing cozily together. I did not see my pretty lace-maker again, not for years—not until a month ago. Her corporal was still with her, and it was their turn to be undesirably conspicuous. They were part of a

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procession passing along the Rue St. Honoré on its way to the Place of the Revolution. They were standing up in the cart; the lace-maker had grown fat, and she was scolding her poor corporal bitterly. What a habit that must have been!—they were not five minutes from the guillotine. I own that a thrill of gratitude to Louis temporarily softened me toward him, though at the very moment I was following him through the crowd. At least he saved me from the lace-maker!

ELOISE [shrinking from him]. You are horrible!

VALSIN. To my regret you must find me more and more so.

ELOISE [panting]. You *are* going to take us back to Paris, then? To the Tribunal—and to the—

[She covers her eyes with her hands.]

VALSIN [gravely]. I can give you no comfort, governess. You are involved with the Emigrant, and, to be frank, I am going to do as horrible things to Louis as I can invent—and I am an ingenious man. [His manner becomes sinister.] I am near the top. The cinders of

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Marat are in the Pantheon, but Robespierre still flames; and he claims me as his friend. I can do what I will. And I have much in store for Louis before he shall be so fortunate as to die!

ELOISE [faintly]. And—and Eloise—d'Anville?

[Her hands fall from her face: he sees large, beautiful tears upon her cheeks.]

VALSIN [coldly]. Yes.

[She is crushed for the moment; then, recovering herself with a violent effort, lifts her head defiantly and stands erect, facing him.]

ELOISE. You take her head because your officer punished you, six years ago, for a breach of military discipline!

VALSIN [in a lighter tone]. Oh no. I take it, just as she injured me—incidentally. In truth, Citizeness, it isn't I who take it: I only arrest her because the government has proscribed her.

ELOISE. And you've just finished telling me you were preparing tortures for her! I thought you an intelligent man. Pah! You're only a gymnast.

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[She turns away from him haughtily and moves toward the door.]

VALSIN [touching his scarf of office]. True. I climb.

[She halts suddenly, as if startled by this; she stands as she is, her back to him, for several moments, and does not change her attitude when she speaks.]

ELOISE [slowly]. You climb alone.

VALSIN [with a suspicious glance at her]. Yes—alone.

ELOISE [in a low voice]. Why didn't you take the lace-maker with you? You might have been happier.

[Very slowly she turns and comes toward him, her eyes full upon his: she moves deliberately and with incomparable grace. He seems to be making an effort to look away, and failing: he cannot release his eyes from the glorious and starry glamour that holds them. She comes very close to him, so close that she almost touches him.]

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ELOISE [in a half-whisper]. You might have been happier with—a friend—to climb with you.

VALSIN [demoralized]. Citizeness—I am—I—

ELOISE [in a voice of velvet]. Yes. Say it. You are—

VALSIN [desperately]. I have told you that I am the most susceptible of men.

ELOISE [impulsively putting her hand on his shoulder]. Is it a crime? Come, my friend, you are a man who *does* climb: you will go over all. You believe in the Revolution because you have used it to lift you. But other things can help you, too. Don't you need them?

VALSIN [understanding perfectly, gasping]. Need what?

[She draws her hand from his shoulder, moves back from him slightly, and crosses her arms upon her bosom with a royal meekness.]

ELOISE [grandly]. Do I seem so useless?

VALSIN [in a distracted voice]. Heaven help me! What do you want?

ELOISE. Let these people go.

[Hurriedly, leaning near him.]

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I have promised to save them: give them their permit to embark, and I—

[She pauses, flushing beautifully, but does not take her eyes from him.]

I—I do not wish to leave France. My place is in Paris. You will go into the National Committee. You can be its ruler. You *will* rule it! I believe in you! [Glowing like a rose of fire.] I will go with you. I will help you! I will marry you!

VALSIN [in a fascinated whisper]. Good Lord!
[He stumbles back from her, a strange light in his eyes.]

ELOISE. You are afraid—

VALSIN [with sudden loudness]. I am! Upon my soul, I am afraid!

ELOISE [smiling gloriously upon him]. Of what, my friend? Tell me of what?

VALSIN [explosively]. Of myself! I am afraid of myself because I am a prophet. This is precisely what I foretold to myself you would do! I knew it, yet I am aghast when it happens—aghast at my own cleverness!

ELOISE [bewildered to blankness]. What?

VALSIN [half hysterical with outrageous

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vanity]. I swear I knew it, and it fits so exactly that I am afraid of myself! *Aha*, Valsin, you rogue! I should hate to have you on *my* track! Citizen governess, you are a wonderful person, but not so wonderful as this devil of a Valsin!

ELOISE [vaguely, in a dead voice]. I cannot understand what you are talking about. Do you mean—

VALSIN. And what a spell was upon me! I was near calling Dossonville to preserve me.

ELOISE [speaking with a strange naturalness, like a child's]. You mean—you don't want me?

VALSIN. Ah, Heaven help me, I am going to laugh again! Oh, ho, ho! I am spent!

[He drops into a chair and gives way to another attack of uproarious hilarity.] Ah, ha, ha, ha! Oh, my liver, ha, ha! No, Citizeness, I do not want you! Oh, ha, ha, ha!

ELOISE. *Oh!*

[She utters a choked scream and rushes at him.]

Swine!

VALSIN [warding her off with outstretched hands]. Spare me! Ha, ha, ha! I am helpless!

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Ho, ho, ho! Citizeness, it would not be worth your while to strangle a man who is already dying!

ELOISE [beside herself]. Do you dream that I *meant* it?

VALSIN [feebly]. Meant to strangle me?

ELOISE [frantic]. To give myself to you!

VALSIN. In short, to—to marry me!

[He splutters.]

ELOISE [furiously]. It was a ruse—

VALSIN [soothingly]. Yes, yes, a trick. I saw that all along.

ELOISE [even more infuriated]. For their sake, beast!

[She points to the other room.]

To save *them*!

VALSIN [wiping his eyes]. Of course, of course.

[He rises, stepping quickly to the side of the chair away from her and watching her warily.]

I knew it was to save them. We'll put it like that.

ELOISE [in an anger of exasperation]. It *was* that!

VALSIN. Yes, yes.

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[Keeping his distance.]

I saw it from the first.

[Suppressing symptoms of returning mirth.]

It was perfectly plain. You mustn't excite yourself—nothing could have been clearer!

[A giggle escapes him, and he steps hastily backward as she advances upon him.]

ELOISE. Poodle! Valet! Scum of the alleys! Sheep of the prisons! Jailer! Hangman! Assassin! Brigand! *Horse-doctor!*

[She hurls the final epithet at him in a climax of ferocity which wholly exhausts her; and she sinks into the chair by the desk, with her arms upon the desk and her burning face hidden in her arms. VALSIN, morbidly chuckling, in spite of himself, at each of her insults, has retreated farther and farther, until he stands with his back against the door of the inner room, his right hand behind him, resting on the latch. As her furious eyes leave him he silently

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opens the door, letting it remain a few inches ajar and keeping his back to it. Then, satisfied that what he intends to say will be overheard by those within, he erases all expression from his face, and strides to the dismantled doorway in the passage.]

VALSIN [calling loudly]. Dossonville!

[He returns, coming down briskly to ELOISE. His tone is crisp and soldier-like.]

Citizeness, I have had my great hour. I proceed with the arrests. I have given you four plenty of time to prepare yourselves. Time? Why, the Emigrant could have changed clothes with one of the women in there a dozen times if he had hoped to escape in that fashion—as historical prisoners *have* won clear, it is related. Fortunately, that is impossible just now; and he will not dare to attempt it.

DOSSONVILLE [appearing in the hallway]. Present, my chieftain!

VALSIN [sharply]. Attend, Dossonville. The returned Emigrant, Valny-Cherault, is forfeited; but because I cherish a special grievance

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against him, I have decided upon a special punishment for him. It does not please me that he should have the comfort and ministrations of loving women on his journey to the Tribunal. No, no; the presence of his old sweetheart would make even the scaffold sweet to him. Therefore I shall take him alone. I shall let these women go.

DOSSONVILLE. What refinement! Admirable!

[ELOISE slowly rises, staring incredulously at VALSIN.]

VALSIN [picking up the "permit" from the desk]. "Permit the Citizen Balsage and his sister, the Citizeness Virginie Balsage, and his second sister, Marie Balsage, and Eloise d'Anville—" Ha! You see, Dossonville, since one of these three women is here, there are two in the other room with the Emigrant. They are to come out, leaving him there. First, however, we shall disarm him. You and I have had sufficient experience in arresting aristocrats to know that they are not always so sensible as to give themselves up peaceably, and I happened to see the outline of a pistol under the Emigrant's frock the other day in the diligence.

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We may as well save one of us from a detestable hole through the body.

[He steps toward the door, speaking sharply.]

Emigrant, you have heard. For your greater chagrin, these three devoted women are to desert you. Being an aristocrat, you will pretend to prefer this arrangement. They are to leave at once. Throw your pistol into this room, and I will agree not to make the arrest until they are in safety. They can reach your vessel in five minutes. When they have gone, I give you my word not to open this door for ten.

[A pistol is immediately thrown out of the door, and falls at VALSIN's feet. He picks it up, his eyes alight with increasing excitement.]

VALSIN [tossing the pistol to DOSSONVILLE].
Call the lieutenant.

[DOSSONVILLE goes to the window, leans out, and beckons. VALSIN writes hastily at the desk, not sitting down.]

"Permit the three women Balsage to embark

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without delay upon the *Jeune Pierrette*. Signed: Valsin." There, Citizeness, is a "permit" which permits.

[He thrusts the paper into the hand of ELOISE, swings toward the door of the inner room, and raps loudly upon it.]

Come, my feminines! Your sailors await you—brave, but no judges of millinery. There's a fair wind for you; and a grand toilet is wasted at sea. Come, charmers; come!

[The door is half opened, and Madame DE LASEYNE, white and trembling violently, enters quickly, shielding as much as she can the inexpressibly awkward figure of her brother, behind whom she extends her hand, closing the door sharply. He wears the brocaded skirt which Madame DE LASEYNE has taken from the portmanteau, and ELOISE's long mantle, the lifted hood and Madame DE LASEYNE's veil shrouding his head and face.]

VALSIN [in a stifled voice]. At last! At last



"OH, TOUCHING DEVOTION! OH, SISTERS! OH, LOVE! OH, HONEY! OH, PETTICOATS-"

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one beholds the regal d'Anville! No Amazon—

DOSSONVILLE [aghast]. It looks like—

VALSIN [shouting]. It doesn't!

[He bows gallantly to LOUIS.]

A cruel veil, but, oh, what queenly grace!

[LOUIS stumbles in the skirt.

VALSIN falls back, clutching at his side. But ELOISE rushes to LOUIS and throws herself upon her knees at his feet. She pulls his head down to hers and kisses him through the veil.]

VALSIN [madly]. Oh, touching devotion! Oh, sisters! Oh, love! Oh, honey! Oh, petticoats—

DOSSONVILLE [interrupting humbly]. The lieutenant, Citizen Commissioner.

[He points to the hallway, where the officer appears, standing at attention.]

VALSIN [wheeling]. Officer, conduct these three persons to the quay. Place them on board the *Jeune Pierrette*. The captain will weigh anchor instantly.

[The officer salutes.]

ANNE [hoarsely to LOUIS, who is lifting the

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weeping ELOISE to her feet]. Quick! In the name of—

VALSIN. Off with you!

[Madame DE LASEYNE seizes the portmanteau and rushes to the broken doorway, half dragging the others with her. They go out in a tumultuous hurry, followed by the officer. ELOISE sends one last glance over her shoulder at VALSIN as she disappears, and one word of concentrated venom: "*Buffoon!*" In wild spirits he blows a kiss to her. The fugitives are heard clattering madly down the stairs.]

DOSSONVILLE [excitedly]. We can take the Emigrant now.

[Going to the inner door.]

Why wait—

VALSIN. That room is empty.

DOSSONVILLE. What!

VALSIN [shouting with laughter]. He's gone! Not barebacked, but in petticoats: that's worse! He's gone, I tell you! The other was the d'Anville.

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DOSSONVILLE. Then you recog—

VALSIN. Imbecile, she's as well known as the Louvre! They're off on their honeymoon! She'll take him now! She will! She will, on the soul of a prophet!

[He rushes to the window and leans far out, shouting at the top of his voice:]

Quits with you, Louis! Quits! Quits!

[He falls back from the window and relapses into a chair, cackling ecstatically.]

DOSSONVILLE [hoarse with astonishment]. You've let him go! You've let 'em *all* go!

VALSIN [weak with laughter]. Well, *you're* not going to inform.

[With a sudden reversion to extreme seriousness, he levels a sinister forefinger at his companion.]

And, also, take care of your health, friend; remember constantly that you have a weak throat, *and don't you ever mention this to my wife!* These are bad times, my Dossonville, and neither you nor I will see the end of them.

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Good Lord! Can't we have a little fun as we go along?

[A fresh convulsion seizes him, and he rocks himself pitiably in his chair.]

[THE CURTAIN]

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